

## Sierra Mono Museum

The town of North Fork has two major annual events, the Loggers' Jamboree and the Indian Fair Days. Both are held at the community recreation center, about one mile east of the town on the east fork (south) of Willow Creek which drains south from Bass Lake to the San Joaquin River. The Recreation Center was the place of the last ethnographic village of the North Fork Mono. In 1934, Mono families were forcibly removed with no compensation financially or trade of property. Most of the inhabitants went to live with other family members. The Indian name for this village site is "Muchipe Way," meaning the "place of the flea." The village land was taken by Pacific Gas and Electric Company for a water storage basin. It was never used for that purpose. In the early 1940's the land was sold to the community and purchased by the North Fork School principal for \$1.00. The principal later transferred the property to a community based organization for the same amount, one dollar. This community organization later in the 1960's and 1970's evolved into what is today the North Fork Boosters organization. At no time was the land ever offered back to the displaced Mono families or to the tribe.

In the 1940's and 1950's the Recreation Center was used as rodeo grounds. Pipes for water to the corrals still exist today as evidence of what transpired fifty years ago. This rodeo activity was co-sponsored by both the local Indians and the non-Indian community. Toward the end of the 1950's [Fresno Bee, 1958; Officially 1960, North Fork Loggers' Jamboree Committee] the Boosters started the Loggers' Jamboree which they still sponsor as a major fundraiser and town promotional (Fresno Bee 1958-98). Mono from the Tribe, Sierra Mono Museum, North Fork Rancheria, and folks from the community and community organizations work together, participate, and support wholeheartedly this annual community event, held each July. The event was highlighted in the early 1970's when national celebrity, Charles Kuralt, visited the event and showed twenty minutes of the Loggers' Jamboree and his visit to North Fork on his sixty minute national television show.

In the mid 1950's (1955; Mono Elders), another organization, the Sierra Indian Center, started an annual gathering called the Indian Days Celebration, which was also held at the Recreation Center. The Sierra Indian Center was largely comprised of North Fork Mono and Chukchansi from a neighboring Yokotch tribal group. The Chukchansi are located to the west of the Mono and lower in the foothills. Both tribal groups, which are of eastern Madera County, as well as other Mono and Yokotch tribal people from the foothills and valley of Fresno County, formed the heart of the membership of the Sierra Indian Center (Fresno Bee 1959-65).

Eleven years later (1966), the North Fork Mono contingency broke away to form their own separate organization. The focus was to raise funds to build a cultural center to preserve their culture, exhibit their artifacts, provide a secure storage facility for families to store their private collections and to seek collections for donation to exhibit to the public. The new event became the Indian Fair Days, and continues to be held at the Recreation Center. Now in its 40th year since the Museum staff took over, the event has been highly successful, drawing eight to ten thousand visitors during the first full weekend in August of each year (Fresno Bee 1966-98).

In 1971, with a sizable donation from a community family (Mr. and Mrs. Philip Haber), the Sierra Mono Museum was built. The Sierra Mono Museum is the only Indian owned, Indian operated museum on privately owned Indian land in the State of California. The Sierra Mono Museum receives no subsidy from federal or state funding sources. There are other Indian owned and Indian operated Museums or Interpretive Centers in the State but they are located on federal trust lands. The Museum is also the headquarters for the North Fork Mono Tribe. The Museum is for all Mono but it is the North Fork Mono who predominantly raised and continue to raise the funds to keep the operation of the Museum going.

As an educational/ cultural attraction over 10,000 school children visit the Museum annually. Another 15,000 people annually come from worldwide to visit the renowned Museum. In 1984, from a study conducted by Madera County through a firm from Tennessee, the Sierra Mono Museum was acclaimed as the number one tourist attraction in Madera County. In 1990, from a study co-sponsored by the North Fork Mono Tribe to study alternatives for the township, it was found that the Museum was the only business that promoted the town of North Fork on a national scale (Schuler Report).

In 1978, the Sierra Mono Museum began curating archaeological artifacts from a Pacific Gas and Electric Company relicensing project along the San Joaquin River. In 1980, the Museum signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the United States Forest Service to curate artifacts from a project in Eastern Fresno County on a Southern California Edison electrical power project. In 1987 the State of California signed a Curatorial Agreement with the Museum on a State Highway project off Highway 168. The Museum and Tribe have since transacted several other curation agreements, burial policies and monitoring policies on archaeological sites involving federal and state agencies. The Tribe and the Museum have transacted projects with the Corps of Engineers' Federal Highway Administration, and neighboring tribes.

The Museum, as a curatorial institution, is an authorized federal and state repository for archaeological data, artifacts and documents. Scholars, doctoral students, college students, anthropologists, ethnographers, archaeologists, historians, geologists, ecologists, ethnobotanists and other scientists and researchers constantly come to the Museum to research and gather data pertinent to their fields of study or projects.

As mentioned above, the Museum's largest fundraiser is the annual Indian Fair Days and Pow Wow held each August. The annual membership appreciation dinner and "membership drive" is held the third weekend in November. The Museum has maintained an average of 200-225 members annually over its 40 year existence, which is a large membership number for organizations in the North Fork area.

The Museum is very active throughout the year with cultural activities open to the public. This past year the Mono Language was taught by elders using as a resource a Mono language dictionary and other previously recorded language documents. The Mono Dictionary, in its third edition, was prepared by Mono elder and historian Rosalie Bethel, through the linguistics department at the University of California, Los Angeles. Beading and quilting classes are held on a weekly basis. Over the past 40 years, many classes on the art of basketry making, native plant identification and uses, Mono language, and other cultural traditions have been on-going. All classes are open to the community, museum members and general public.

The Museum has recently met the standards as a Federal Repository for archive documents and artifacts from federal lands. The Museum is also a member in good standing with the National Museum Association.